



When we do not have a connection to God, we try to possess more and more to soothe our anxieties, satisfy our desires and secure our lives. But when we keep our connection with God, we feel we have everything. We don't have to carry all those things and worry about it being lost or stolen, because everything is in God and it is available to us all the time.

## 2. Presentation of Jesus

Today is January 1<sup>st</sup>, a new beginning of the year 2012. Many families get together and share food and blessings. In Korea, family members gathered in the morning at their parents' house. They wear traditional clothes or new clothes and give a big bow to their parents. Parents gave birth to them, and a big bow is a way to show their respect to the origin of their lives.



The children say, "We wish you have a happy New Year. We wish you to be healthy and live longer." Then, the parents say, "In the New Year, I wish your dreams are fulfilled."

So, they exchange blessings, and the parents give some money to the little children as a token of their blessing. If their children are grown up, then the children give money to their parents.

After breakfast, the family members go to the graves of their ancestors and give a big bow to their deceased ancestors. Christians do not give a big bow to the deceased. So they have a worship service around the grave instead of bowing. It is a Korean tradition for New Year day to respect their origin.

There were Jewish traditions for a new beginning of a baby. When Jesus was born, the first thing the parents did was 'circumcision' in the synagogue, and then they presented the baby Jesus in the Jerusalem temple. By following the traditional rituals, they confessed that the baby did not belong to them, but belonged to God. It was their way to show respect to God, who is the origin of their lives and their children.

Both Jesus' presentation in the Temple and Koreans' New Year tradition implicate that the new beginning must start with respect to God, connection to God and alignment with God.

### 3. Circumcision and Naming

During the time of presentation to God, Jewish people observed three rituals: Circumcision, Redemption and Purification.



Luke 2:21 says about circumcision. It was done usually in a synagogue when a baby was on the eighth day. The tradition of circumcision began with Abraham and Isaac. Circumcision is a ritual of a covenant that they belong to God. Through a birth, they have a life, and through circumcision, they become children of God. Circumcision separates the Jewish from the Gentiles. If the Gentiles wanted to be the children of God, they were asked to be circumcised. It became a controversial issue when Paul tried to convert the Gentiles to Christianity. Then, in the Christian community, 'circumcision' was replaced with 'baptism'.

When a child was circumcised, the child was named. With the circumcision and a name, the baby officially became a child of God and a member of the community. In Luke 2:21, the main focus was on 'naming' rather than on 'circumcision', because in the case of Jesus, Luke thought that 'the name, Jesus' was more important than 'circumcision'. For Jesus, his name has his own destiny. 'Jesus' is the Greek form of *Joshua*, and it means 'the Lord saves'. He was named 'Jesus', because he will save his people from their sins. (Matt. 1:21)

I named my first Son 'San'. 'San' means 'a mountain'. I wished that my son would grow like a mountain, which is stable, faithful and strong. Then, when I had the second son, I wanted to name him 'sky'. When I was about to announce it to the congregation, my mother-in-law called and said I should change the name. If the second son 'sky' is higher than the first son 'mountain', then it will cause a sibling problem. So, I changed the second son's name to 'Garam', which means 'a river'. I wanted my second son to respect his elder brother, and grow with wisdom and flexibility like a river. The name identifies the person, and the baby was named Jesus as God wanted him to be.

My son, San has a middle name. It is 'DaeSoo'. His full name is San Daesoo Kang. San is a pure Korean name, but 'Dae Soo' is from a Chinese word, and it means 'big water,

or big sea'. I like the name 'San', but out of courtesy and respect, I asked my father to name my first son. San is not only my son, but also my father's grandson, and it was our way to respect our parents. Moreover, he had many granddaughters, but San was his first grandson. My father was happy with San, and he gave a name 'Dae Soo', which was based on his dream of San's birth.

When the baby was named, usually the father named his baby. The name 'Jesus' was not given by Joseph or Mary, but it was given by the Angel Gabriel. It means the baby was named 'Jesus' by God, because Joseph was not his father, but God was. By naming the baby Jesus, God declared that Jesus was His Son.

#### **4. Redemption & Purification**

Because of the blood during childbirth, Mary was ritually unclean. She could not touch holy things at home or go to synagogue on the Sabbath. She had to stay home and wait for forty days. Such 'clean' or 'unclean' ritual seems strange and limits the freedom of the mother, but in fact, it protects the mother and the son.



In a Korean tradition, when a child was born, we set up a line to implicate that a baby was born and people were forbidden to come into the house for 20 days. It was a ritual, but it helps the mother to take a rest and protects the child who has a weak immune system from being sick. After 40 days, the mother and the child can then go outside.

During the unclean 40 days, the mother Mary could take a rest and the baby Jesus was protected from being sick. After that period, Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem, which was about 4 miles away from Bethlehem, and presented Jesus in the temple of God.

In the temple they observed the ritual of 'redemption' for the baby. As a reminder of the exodus, the firstborn child was consecrated to the Lord (Exod. 13:2). The firstborn male was to be redeemed at a price of five shekels of silver (Num. 18:15-16).

Then, the Levites were designated to offer service to God and atonement for the people in place of the firstborn (Num 8:14-19). It was a ritual to declare that the firstborn belonged to God.

- My mom wanted his first son, who is my elder brother, to be a pastor. But he didn't feel the call. So my mom encouraged me to be a pastor instead of my elder brother. Now, I have two sons, and the first son belonged to God. I will be happy if he becomes a pastor to serve God.

Then, they also observed the ritual of purification for the mother Mary. Mary offered to God a pair of doves or two young pigeons according to the Laws for the purification of herself. By observing the purification, ritually she became clean and she could return to her community.

## 5. Alignment with God

When Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph observed all the rituals that were required by the law: Circumcision, Redemption and Purification. These rituals are important for a new baby to begin his life, because it manifests that the baby belongs to God, and therefore, God will protect him and guide him.

All these rituals are about 'connection' to God, and 'alignment with God". Isaiah said that 'righteousness' means "perfect alignment with God". Through the rituals, the parents and the child want to be aligned with God to start a new beginning.



Every state and nation has a flower symbol. Christians also have a flower symbol. It is a 'sunflower'. It is said that sunflowers grow toward the Sun and move as the Sun moves. This is a sunflower field in Fargo, North Dakota. It is beautiful that all of the sunflowers lean toward the direction to the Sun. These sunflowers represent Christians. We are people who are seeking God together. This is the first day of the year, and I wish you all to begin the new day with God's Grace and keep connected with God by seeking Him like a sunflower.